

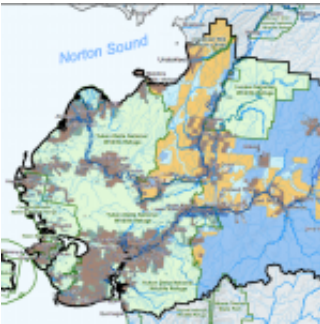


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BLM seeks public input on 20-year land use plan

by [Ben Matheson](#) on December 2, 2013



Bering Sea Western
Interior Planning Area /
credit: BLM

The Bureau of Land Management is setting its strategy for over 10 million acres of land across a vast section of southwest Alaska. The agency is in the middle of holding a dozen meetings to gather input on the early stages of the plan.

The Bering Sea Western Interior planning area is big. It includes 62 million acres with many land owners beyond BLM stretching north to Unalakleet and east to Denali National Park.

Resident of several Kuskokwim communities use BLM lands for accessing important subsistence resources. BLM’s Jorjena Daly is the plan lead. She says the agency is required under ANILCA to ensure its decision have the least adverse impact on people’s access to subsistence resources as well as the fish and wild resources itself. Planning for that will take the public’s help.

“During scoping, what’s really important for us to hear from community residents is where on BLM land they go to access those subsistence resources, how they access those subsistence resources, and what time of year, so we have that

knowledge moving ahead developing the RMP and we can take that into consideration for instance if other land use permits or authorization are applied for in those areas,” said Daly.

The BLM has another tool to protect certain species or habitats called areas of critical environmental concern. Alan Bittner is the Anchorage field manager for BLM. He says southwest Alaska has a few outdated ones at least.

“A few years back, peregrine falcons were listed under the endangered species act. That listing has been removed and we need to revisit those areas of critical and environmental concern. But there may be another area of critical and environmental concern and we may put another designation for some other purpose on the land,” said Bittner.

Another big piece of the plan is its role with so called D-1 lands. These were withdrawn under ANCSA and given special mining rules. 75 percent of the BLM land in the plan is d-1, with 4 million acres open to mining with 2 million acres are closed. Daly says the closures also take away land exchange opportunities and are not available for resource leasing.

“So where there’s a withdrawal in place that has closed those activities from occurring we’ve also excluding opportunities for leasing. That might include coal leasing, oil and gas, where there’s potential, it’s not been allowed,” said Daly.

Changes to D-1 lands would come in the form of a recommendation to the Secretary of the interior. BLM will use the document in considering applications for projects like pipelines, cell towers, and guided hunting. Bittner says public input into all parts of the plan is important.

“You know we won’t touch a document like this for again another 20 years, so it’s important to have the designations accurate based on the uses that have to take place for the next 20 years,” said Bittner.

The website with maps and comment forms is located [here](#). January 17th is the deadline for comments.

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